

Origins of Kimika Inoue

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1. Default Chapter Title

'The New Kid on the Block'

Between 'Biyomon Gets Firepower' and 'Kabuterimon's Electro Shocker'

By Debbie (Dai-chan)

Takeru pulled on his brother's brown glove and said, "Matt, I am hungry."

Yamato looked down to his little brother, who was looking cheerless, his usually azure eyes now dimmed. He patted on his head. "All of us are, kiddo."

"Tired, too," Sora said from the ahead of the line with a tired-looking Tai by her side.

The seven kids and their Digimon partners were strolling under a thick jungle. The jungle was full of animal noises, a soft breeze carrying them through. Few hours had passed since Biyomon digivolved into Birdramon to save the village of Yokomons from a fiery, tall Digimon named Meramon. The experience was interesting and new, like the Digivolutions of Agumon and Gabumon. The kids were curious to see what would the other Digimon digivolve into, but only food and sleep were on their minds.

The sun was setting, its dimming rays showing off breathtaking colors of pink and orange. But no one enjoyed it. They were so tired, but kept on. All of the Digimon were trying to hide their continuing yawns.

Catching her Digimon partner, Palmon, covering another yawn, Mimi

groaned under the pain of her poor feet. "My feet hurt, and I don't want to sleep on the ground. It is too cold!"

They didn't notice that clouds are gathering together, covering the colorful sky with grayness, dimming the light. There was no thunder boom, but one by one the raindrops fell upon the kids, and soon, they stood in the downpour, soaking wet.

"Oh, great," Joe muttered with depression. He dropped down to the ground, shaking out water from his black-blue hair. Gomamon was a bit cheered by the rain, but he was also tired, and he merely rested his head on his partner's lap, no longer lively.

Some sat down, too tired to go on. Tai, Sora, and Yamato were still standing, gazing around the kids with concern. Biyomon tugged on Sora's yellow shirt, and said, "What we need is shelter from the rain."

"No problem!" Tentomon replied from above. He sounded composed and calm. He was the only one who is not fatigued, because he was flying, not walking. All eyes looked up to the red beetle-like Digimon as he held his claw-hand over his pale green eyes. His eyes seemed to lighten up. "A cave ahead!"

"A cave in the middle of a jungle?" Agumon said with confusion, scratching the top of his yellow head with his white talons. "Do you think it is strange, Tai?"

Tai shook his head. He can't wait to get out of the rain. "Nah. Let's go!"

The kids and Digimon followed Tentomon down the path until they found a foothill covered with green ferns. There was a small hole at the base that leads inside. The hole was big enough for them to squeeze through. Tai entered first and found himself in a spacious cave underground. The hole was slightly higher than Tai, like a sunroof in a wall. The group followed inside, and they stared in awe at the size of the cave. There was a small opening at far ahead, but hid by the darkness that was not touched by the light outside.

Gabumon grunted with pleasure from Yamato's side. "Nice, dry, and cozy."

The kids and the Digimon took their time shaking off water. The boys - Tai, Koujiro, Yamato, and Joe shook their hair, spraying out like a series of showers while lucky Sora, Mimi, and Takeru stayed out of the way, their dry hair protected by their hats. Agumon, Tentomon, Palmon and Patamon had no trouble with the rain because of their smooth bodies. But poor Gabumon and Gomamon had to squeeze water out of their fur as Biyomon annoyingly shook water from her pink feathers.

Suddenly, the Digimon sniffed the air, their multicolored eyes brightening. The kids watched them, waiting. The petals on Palmon's head fluttered with delight. "I smell food!" she said. The Digimon agreed with her. The kids beamed at each other, eager to get some food for their growling stomachs.

But before they could do anything, they heard a low, soft growl from the darkness ahead. The growl belonged to a small Digimon who entered

into the light. She was small as Gomamon, but the growl seemed to make her to appear larger, vicious. She looked like a lizard, standing on all four. She had dark purple fur with jet-black and snow-white stripes running across her neck, back, legs, and tail. A red stripe ran down her pointed snout, distinguishing her. She had two small purple horns on her head, like a bull. The long tail was curled over her back, similar to a scorpion. Her black talons clicked against the rocks as she menacingly walked toward the group. Her eyes blazed perilously, the color of dark, dark, red.

"Who is that?" Takeru almost whispered frighteningly as he stepped behind his brother's legs, his eyes wide.

Tentomon answered with knowledge, "She is Iyumon. She is very protective of her territory. She is one of the good Digimon, but don't ever try to cross with her."

The lizard-like Digimon named Iyumon spoke with a soft hissing voice, like a snake. "Get out. You have no right to be here." She didn't threaten, only warned. Her tail uncurled, revealing a club at the end. Small spikes appear on the club.

Shocked at her words, the group moved back a step. "Uhh . . . We better do what she says," spoke Joe, shuddering.

Tentomon flew closer to Iyumon, not feeling threatened. His green eyes gazed right in her red eyes. He spoke like he was meeting an old friend, "Iyumon, we are not here to battle you."

Iyumon scowled, her eyes going darker. Her voice was still soft. "I warned you." Suddenly, the spikes on the club sprang out. The spikes struck harmlessly on Tentomon's hard shell, but the sudden movement shocked him, and he fluttered his gossamer wings, shaking his head in befuddlement. The group quickly dodged from the spikes. The spikes landed uselessly on the ground. Hearts beating, the group looked back to Iyumon with uneasily caution.

"We don't want to fight you, Iyumon!" Tentomon said, trying again.

Iyumon wasn't looking happy. She said nothing, not believing him, still glaring at the red beetle Digimon. But then a new voice called out from the darkness, concerned and curious.

"Iyumon?"

Iyumon almost started at her name, but answered back, though her eyes never left Tentomon, "Stay back. There are invaders here in the cave."

Soon, the group could see who the voice belonged to. A girl Tai's age entered into the light. She was dark-skinned. Her black hair came in many thin braids, covering her shoulders and back. Bright red sunglasses held back the braids from her gentle face. She wore a dark red tank top with a black stripe across her chest, dark blue jeans with a green belt, and dark yellow gloves and boots that touched decently with her skin. She had the look of patience and kindness. Her brown eyes went wide with surprise at the strange kids and Digimon, but then she saw Tai.

"Tai?" she spoke, grinning with gladness.

"Kim?" Tai said with new bewilderment. "Is that really you?" He stepped forward to her, but Iyumon quickly jumped in front of Kim, growling up to Tai. Nervous of the red eyes, he gulped and stepped back.

Kim stepped around and putted a reassuring gentle hand on Iyumon's shoulder. "That's okay, Iyumon. I know him well."

Tai hugged her warmly, and she returned the hug. They seemed to be old friends. Tai looked at her again, disbelieved, but beaming. "It's a surprise to see you, Kim."

Kim laughed amiably and playfully ruffled his already untidy brown hair. "I'm full of surprises."

Agumon broke the silence around the group and walked up to Tai's side. He pointed up to the girl with curiosity. "Who is she?"

Tai forgot himself and, clearing his throat, introduced her to the group. "Guys, this's Kimika Inoue, my childhood best friend."

"You can call me Kim for short," she said. She looked timid, but smiled.

"These are my friends, Agumon; Sora and Biyomon; Izzy and Tentomon; Joe and Gomamon; Mimi and Palmon; Yamato and Gabumon; and TK and Patamon."

Kim nodded, acknowledging each person and Digimon. "Nice to meet you. This's Iyumon, my good friend."

Tentomon landed by Iyumon and grinned, even though his metal-like mouth moved not. "Told ya we don't want to fight with you."

"Hmph." Iyumon eyed him. She looked no longer dangerous, vicious, but with her usual caution. "Friends of Kim are my friends, too. Just don't get too friendly with me, okay?"

Tentomon laughed good-naturedly, and even Iyumon smiled coyly, suddenly looking alike to Kim for an instant.

"How did you get here?" asked Mimi with interest.

Kim answered, "It's long story, I can tell you all about it during supper. I have food and a fire back there." At the mention of food, the Digimon cheered with delight as the kids licked their lips. All followed Kim and Iyumon deeper in the cave until they arrived into another chamber with a small fire set in rocks in the center.

The cave was actually a natural tunnel burrowing deeper into the ground for some reason. The tunnel was packed with several chambers, probably for rest before moving on. There were palm leaves covered with odd-looking berries, fruit, and nuts near the fire, just enough for everyone. Iyumon herself picked them out and they were delicious, said Gomamon after he tried a berry.

The kids sat in a circle around the fire - Tai, Sora, Mimi, Joe, Koushiro, Yamato, and Kim, along with their Digimon partners usually

sitting by. Takeru chose to be separated from them, sitting on a rock, slowly eating few berries and nuts as Patamon sat near, his blue eyes shut. No one noticed that Takeru had a distrust glint in his blue eyes as he watched the older kids.

Koushiro popped a berry in his mouth and asked to Kim, "So, how did you receive access to Digiworld?"

Kim answered, "Well, to make a long story long, I was late for camp because of my doctor parents' meeting."

_A flashback appears . . . _

—

Her boots crunching over new snow, Kim ran through the campground. She stopped often, trying to find her buddy, Tai. She had promised him to meet him at the first day of the camp, but he might be upset that she didn't show up. They know each other since they were babies and see each other as siblings of the same age, even though Tai had his younger sister, Kari, and Kim had her older brother, Trevor, who was in college. Sighing, Kim stopped, looking around, and remembered the news about the weird weather. She wondered why it was snowing in the middle of the summer, but she didn't have the time to think. She tugged on her small red backpack and ran again, searching. She turned around a cabin and stopped in her tracks.

_ 'I was trying to find Tai when I saw that weird light in the sky.' _

—

Kim stared in awe at the shifting aurora, admiring the colors. Suddenly, she squinted. She thought she saw a small, swirling hole in the center. Then all of a sudden, a something shot out of the hole, leaving behind a thin cloudy streak and crashed at her feet, spraying snow at her.

_ 'I got this Digivice from the sky.' _

—

Spitting out mouthfuls of snow, Kim brushed snow off her clothes and hair. She looked around for the something from the sky, and then she found it, floating in front of her, glowing with an inner blue light. She caught it and studied it intently. So fantasized she was with the strange object that she didn't see the giant green wave rising for her. Before she could react, she was swallowed by it, and her vision went black. When her consciousness returned, she was aware that she was someplace else, not at the camp. She heard a faint voice calling her name, and she opened her eyes. She laid on her stomach, her head at one side. Her brown eyes stared right in the mischievous red eyes of a tiny Digimon. She was small, a head on two black paws with pink-orange fur, a crooked smile, long wavy ears, and two tiny horns on her head.

_ 'I met Sunomon before she digivolved into Iyumon. I don't know what to do in this new place, but I followed Sunomon until we arrived at a beach.' _

—
"Wait!" Mimi's voice broke through. "Was that beach packed with telephone booths?"

"That's right." Kim nodded at her.

"Then you must saw Shellmon!" says Sora.

"Yes! Shellmon appeared and tried to attack us, but Sunomon digivolved to save me."

'Sunomon, digivolve into . . . Iyumon!'__

—
Iyumon called on her 'Rainbow Disc,' which were a group of small colorful discs flying from her horns and attacked Shellmon in his eyes, who screamed in raged pain.

'Iyumon blinded Shellmon and we were able to escape.'

—
"Wow, you must be so brave, Kim," said Yamato. He had a strange, sheepish voice unlike his distant, cool one. He suddenly blushed when Kim's serene eyes turned to him. He lowered his grey-blue eyes and fussed with a berry, hoping no one would see the red flush on his cheeks. Kim did see that and also blushed like Yamato. Thankfully, her dark skin hid the redness. Tai, noticing the strange reactions from Kim and Yamato, arched one of his brown eyebrows in a puzzling slant, but shrugged.__

—
Koushiro asked from Yamato's left side, "Kim, may I ask you a question?" At her nod, he continued, "What is in your bag?"

Kim had her small, red backpack in her lap, holding it very delicately, like something fragile was inside the bag. She opened the drawstring, but before Kim could say anything, Tai said knowingly, "Let me guess, would it be your camera?"

Kim smirked knowingly and taunted, "Gee, how could you guess?" She got out a high-advanced camera from her bag. All the Digimon moved closer to observe the strange object with amazed curiosity. Iyumon took a sniff at it and made a funny face.

"You like taking pictures?" Joe said, the first words he had spoken since the supper.

"I adore photography. It's my dream. I never leave my home without my camera."

Tai crossed his arms behind his head and closed his eyes, grinning. "She and that camera are like glue and paper."

Kim had a mischievous grin on her face. She brought her camera in front of her face, and aimed it to Tai, a sly grin on her face. He opened his eyes, and the camera flashed in his eyes. The kids and

Digimon giggled as a blinded Tai rubbed his eyes.

"You must take the best pictures, Kim," Yamato spoke in his sheepish voice. Kim again blushed as Sora and Mimi giggled to each other, seeming to know what was going on between Yamato and Kim.

Kim gazed over her shoulder at the littlest kid and Digimon on a rock far from the group. The boy had his back to them.

Looking back to Yamato, Kim asked, "Matt, does your brother always act like that?"

Surprised at her words, Yamato looked back to her brother. He didn't realize he was sitting that far. "No. Why?"

"I have a feeling he doesn't like me."

"Oh, nonsense. Let me talk with him." Yamato stood up and walked to his brother. Patamon was awake, watching him with patience. Yamato kneeled by Takeru and said, "Hey, kiddo. Why won't you come and sit by us?"

Takeru had a frown on his innocent face. He almost never frowned, always cheerful. He crossed his arms and looked away. "No way."

"Why not?"

"I don't trust that Kim."

Yamato cocked his head at the way Takeru pronounced the name with dislike. "How come?"

Takeru looked at him, his eyes bright. He leaned forward to speak in a low voice that only Yamato and Patamon can hear, "I bet she is really an alien, a flesh-eating alien disguised as a human and wait for us to get fat on her food so she can feast on us."

Yamato was astonished at his brother's words. Takeru would never suspect anybody as, well, evil. He would find something good about the character to prove that a bad person can be good. "Takeru, I am surprised at you. How could you think of Kim like that?"

Takeru shook his head at him with rue. "It's obvious you are brainwashed by her."

Sighing, Yamato gazed to Patamon.

Patamon shrugged his small shoulders. "There is nothing I can do to change his mind."

"He watches too many science-fiction movies. You will like her; I guarantee you, TK See you later, kiddo." Yamato gave his brother a playful tap on his nose before he went to sit by Kim's side.

Patamon saw Takeru shooting a suspicious glance at the newest girl. He asked, "Why do you think Kim is an alien?"

"It's not only that!" Takeru's eyes were still on the girl.

"Oh?"

"Matt likes her."

Patamon's blue eyes lightened up and giggled. "You are jealous!"

"I am not!" Takeru denied. He was trying to hide it, but Patamon could hear a hint of envy in his voice.

Patamon smirked with the knowledge, but quickly withdrew it before Takeru could see. He glanced over to the girl. "Well, I still think Kim is nice."

Takeru groaned, shaking his head. "Not you, too! You are already brainwashed!"

Bellies full from the supper, all the kids and Digimon fell into a rested sleep, huddled together for warmth. Joe rested his head against a stone as Sora and Mimi slept on both his shoulders. Gomamon dozed on Joe's lap. Biyomon and Palmon snoozed together. Tai laid on his back, his arms outspread, snoring softly as Kouji and Kim slept near. Agumon laid on his side, resting by his human friend's side. Kouji's head rested on his laptop, his hands entwined together on his stomach. Tentomon sat on a rock near Kouji, sleeping although his eyes were open. Kim laid on her side, her head relaxing on Iyemon's flank as the Digimon curled around her. Yamato slumbered on his back, one hand behind his head as a pillow as the other hand rested on his sleeping brother's shoulder, Gabumon sleeping at his usual position by Yamato. Takeru was huddled at Yamato's side, dozing on his chest, comforted. Patamon rested on him as a sort of a blanket, his wings drooping around his head. Snoring and sleeping sounds filled the cave along with the dimming fire in the center. No one was at guard duty; they felt completely safe inside the cave.

Just few hours before dawn, Takeru opened his drowsy eyes. He thought he heard a soft noise. Unmoving, Takeru waited for the noise for a while, and just as his eyes began to droop, he heard it again. The noise was actually a faint voice. More like a lilting voice. Feminine and soft. Takeru raised his head to see who was lilting. No one. All the kids were in a deep sleep, not reacting to the voice. Listening carefully, Takeru then noticed that the voice came from the tunnel that burrowed deep in the ground. He sat up, and Yamato's hand slid off his shoulder. Looking back, Takeru sat frozen as his brother mumbled in his sleep, and his head lolled to one side, breathing deeply. Takeru carefully placed Yamato's hand back to his chest and stood up, trying not to disturb Patamon.

Takeru waited for the voice, and it came softly, continuing singing with an exotic tune. The voice reminded him of his mother when she sang a lullaby to him every night. His innocent curiosity growing, Takeru tiptoed away from the kids and went in the darkness to search for the voice.

Soon time later, Kim opened her eyes and yawned. She was a light sleeper, having the habit of waking up before the hours. Also she thought she heard a faint noise, but it abruptly vanished. She sat up, careful not to disturb her Digimon and stretched her arms.

Without a thought, she looked over to Yamato and saw an empty space between the blond boy and the small orange Digimon.

"TK?" she whispered, not wanting to wake the others. She scanned around, her eyes trying to pick up the young child in the dim light. Her movements disturbed Iyumon, and she yawned, her mouth opening wide to reveal two rows of small but sharp-looking fangs. Blinking her sleepy eyes, Iyumon looked up to Kim. She whispered softly, "TK is missing, Iyumon."

Iyumon again blinked and gazed to the empty space near Yamato. "Where would he be?"

Kim could hear the soft tapping of the rain in the distance. "He wouldn't be in the rain." She turned to the small opening at her far right. "Maybe he went farther inside the cave."

Iyumon crossed her black eyebrows together, her eyes also turning to the opening. "It may be dangerous. We must find him."

Kim nodded at Iyumon and quietly stood up, not to disturb a snoring Tai. She took her camera and putted it across her chest by its black strap. She never went anywhere without her camera, and she would never know when her camera came in handy for an unforeseen emergency. Kim and Iyumon noiselessly stepped over their dozing friends and entered the opening.

Takeru stopped at the end of the tunnel and found himself in an enormous chamber. He had been following the lilting voice through the descending tunnel until the voice stopped in mid tune. The natural chamber was half darkened and half illuminated. The strange light came from patches of coral-like rocks on the massive walls, giving out neat colors of pink and orange, giving the chamber a peaceful mood. He enjoyed the feeling.

He jumped to the ground from the opening, which was above Takeru's head. Rocks scattered near could act as steps, able to help him get back to the opening if he wanted to. He didn't want to; he was too curious to see what is hiding in the darkness ahead. He walked across the floor and noticed that the darkness was a cliff, untouched by the light. The edge was able to be seen, but below, the cliff wall disappeared into the darkness. Takeru knelt by the edge and peeked down. He tripped a pebble, and it fell into the darkness. He waited to hear the echo to acknowledge the deepness of the cliff. There was none. The whistling sound of the pebble falling was long gone.

"Wow, deep," Takeru murmured in wonder.

Suddenly, a scratching sound was heard from behind him. In alarm, Takeru whirled back, and, slowly, his eyes went wider as he gazed higher . . . higher . . . higher. He sucked in a shaken breath.

AAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!!!

—

The scream jolted the kids and Digimon from their sleep. Mimi even yelped in alarm at the scream, thinking she was attacked or something. Her yelp and the scream startled Joe that his glasses fall off his nose. The group looked at each other in fright, wondering who or what had screamed.

Patamon gave out a short, panicked squeal. "TK! Where is he?!" he said, fluttering his wings in anxiety. His azure eyes were full of fear for his friend.

Yamato looked down to the empty space near him, and with a sudden thought, he turned to see another empty space near Tai. He also shouted with panic, "Kim! Iyumon! Where could they go?"

The kids searched around, calling out for the missing kids and Digimon. Then the scream was heard again, this time weaker.

Tai pointed down the tunnel. "The screams come from that direction!" All ran deeper in the tunnel, Patamon far ahead, anxious to find Takeru safe.

Kim and Iyumon heard the scream and stood frozen by the tone of it. Kim broke into a dash, skipping over rocks as Iyumon followed behind with ease. "TK! Where are you?!" Kim shouted out, her hands cupping her mouth. Another scream, a weaker one, answered her. She grew concerned and ran faster.

They stopped at the massive chamber and could see the child standing in a daze at their far right. His eyes were on a monstrous, hideous Digimon. It was like a sand crab without pincers. A hard dark blue smooth shell covered the top. Six thick, crooked legs stuck out from the shell. Ten vermilion tentacles rippled and curled around Takeru, but didn't touch him, forming a circle of tangling appendages. Two yellow eyes glared with savage hunger from the slit below the shell, the glow illuminating the boy's blank face.

"What is that?" Kim said in horror as she stared at the Digimon.

Iyumon growled from her side with loathing. "Crabomon. He hates light and draws on prey by his hypnotizing voice and tentacles."

As her Digimon spoke, Kim frantically tried to think a way to get Takeru to safety from the hideous Digimon called Crabomon, but an idea struck in her mind. "Hates light, eh?" Kim jumped off from the opening, and ran toward Takeru, ignoring Iyumon's call of her name. She was frightened of Crabomon, but she must save Takeru or she will never forgive herself. She passed through the tentacles and stood in front of Takeru. The tentacles froze in place, and the yellow eyes dimmed a bit, focusing on her. Kim raised her camera and said, "Smile and say digi-cheese!"

* * * FLASH!!! * * *

The sudden light blinded Crabomon, and he shrieked, making a terrible, high-pitched sound. The tentacles rubbed at his eyes as he stepped back from the light. The shriek hurt Kim's ears, and she dropped her camera to cover her ears. Takeru blinked once, out of the daze, but groggy. Seeing the time is now, Kim grabbed Takeru's arm and ran away, dragging him.

Iyumon sprinted forward, passing them. Kim knew Iyumon was trying to protect them, and she had faith that she would be able to defeat the crab-like Digimon. Iyumon lowered her horns and shouted, "Rainbow Disc!" Glowing discs of the colors of a newborn rainbow shot from her horns and struck on Crabomon's shell. They had no effect on it, but they provoked Crabomon. With a furious wave of a tentacle, Crabomon slapped Iyumon out of the way. She crashed on a wall.

"Iyumon!" Kim stopped in her tracks, seeing her Digimon injured and groaning in agony. Takeru held on her hand, his azure eyes wide in confused alarm.

Hearing her voice, Crabomon turned his yellow eyes to them. Shaking but trying to be brave, Kim pushed Takeru behind her, her brown eyes hard with courage, meeting the savage eyes. Crabomon suddenly thrush a tentacle toward them, preparing to crush them. Kim quickly held up an arm, knowing it was hopeless to brace against the force, as Takeru screamed in terror.

A Digivice shrieked in the dim light. A white aura shined from Kim's green belt.

Kim and Takeru gazed up at the beam of light as it covered Iyumon.

_Iyumon, digivolve into . . . _

—

A Digivice glowed, and poured a beam of light on Iyumon as she spun in place. Balls of silver burst from her, and she digivolved. A large wingless dragon-like Digimon stood in place of Iyumon. Average in size, her fur was pale purple with wavy red stripes over her slender body. Her head was a golden mask with small horns lining the edge of the mask like a mane. Her eyes were pale golden with red runes on her cheeks. Her tail was whip-like with red spikes at the end. Balls of the colors of a rainbow shone behind her.

. . . Rianmon!

—

A long, spiked purple tail went out of nowhere and knocked the tentacle away from the kids. Kim and Takeru looked up and gaped at the sight of the evolved form of Iyumon.

"Go!" Rianmon said in a silvery voice to her partner before faced Crabomon.

Kim and Takeru made no move, awed at the new Digimon, and then they heard a familiar voice coming from the opening.

"Kim! TK! Over here!"

They gazed back and saw their friends appearing just inside the opening. All were shaken at the sight of Crabomon. Yamato wasn't looking at the Digimon; he was waving his arms at Kim and Takeru, pure anxiety on his face.

Kim held on Takeru's hand, and both ran toward him, but Rianmon's huge tail dropped in their path, blocking them from the group. The group couldn't get to them because of that, too. They were forced to watch the two Digimon in battle.

Rianmon dodged and blocked Crabomon's hysterical attacks of his tentacles, never allowing him to have a bit of damage on her. Rianmon was too fast. She ducked her head as her tail smoothly and swiftly blocked the tentacles. Her face a sign of pure stillness, Rianmon marked Crabomon with four deep gaps on the shell with her white talons. She must be so strong to be able to drive that deep.

Crabomon snarled ferociously. His yellow eyes blazed along with Rianmon's golden eyes. He raised two of his legs and lunged to stab her in the stomach. But Rianmon jumped out of the way, her landing shaking the very cave. Kim and Takeru ran farther from the group in order to avoid Rianmon.

"Bomb Blaze!"

A sphere of radiant white-orange light, so bright that the kids and Digimon forced to shield their eyes, shot out of Rianmon's wide mouth. It made a trilling sound as it soared toward Crabomon's eyes. Blind and in pain, Crabomon screeched so terribly that the group slapped their hands over their ears to struggle against the pain, and Rianmon shook her head in ache at the screech. The cave quaked as Crabomon's tentacles struck the ceiling and walls, breaking off chunks of rocks, bouncing off the two Digimon harmlessly. Crabomon stepped back and slips off the cliff. His screech was still heard long after he vanished into the darkness.

During that moment, Kim and Takeru lost their footing, trying to get to the group, who was also tumbling, losing balance. Takeru captured a glimpse of the shiny camera, undamaged, on the floor.

"Wait, your camera!" Takeru pulled his hand out of Kim's and ran off to get it, balancing along with the tremors.

"Forget about it, TK!" Kim shouted. She heard a cracking sound and looked up. She stood up and darted as fast as she could toward the boy.

"TK! Watch out!" Yamato yelled in horror, also looking up. He jumped down from the opening, and at the moment his feet met the ground, he broke into a run to his brother. He was too far from him, but Kim was near, gaining feet by the second.

Takeru picked up the camera in excitement, but at the same time, the crackling sound and the yell of his name rang through the air. The cave stopped quaking, but an ominous feeling remained in the air. He looked up and saw a boulder falling down toward him, the rock getting bigger alarmingly in his vision. Stunned, he stood frozen, the camera in his sweating hands,

Kim wrapped her arms around his waist and heaved herself against Takeru. The boulder crashed harmlessly behind them. The force she heaved with was so powerful that she stumbled over her feet, and they rolled forward, Kim holding on Takeru firmly, the camera in between. The group gave out gasps and screams of terror as the kids rolled

toward the cliff, couldn't stop themselves. They rolled off . . .

Acting on instinct, Kim grabbed on the edge with a hand, the other holding Takeru's hand. In his shock, Takeru lost his grip on the camera. Silently, he watched sadly as the camera disappeared into the darkness.

Yamato dashed as fast as he could toward them. "Kim! Hold on!"

"I . . . can't!" Kim groaned with the tension to hold on. Her fingers began to throb with unmistakable pain from the weight upon them.

"Kim, you must!"

"Can't . . . keep . . . on!" Her hand slid bit by bit. Kim tried to keep on the grip, but it was too much . . .

Yamato skidded forward on his belly, reaching as far as he could. Her hand lost the grip. His hands just missed her hand by a mere inch. His hands clasped together, catching nothing but air. "NO!" he hollered as he saw the fearful faces of the girl and his brother fading into the darkness.

Like a snake, without a sound, Rianmon slithered off the cliff and dove in the darkness.

The kids knelt along with Yamato, their wide eyes scanning the blackness, their ears straining to hear anything. Only their rapid heartbeats and quickened breaths were heard in the silence. They waited . . . waited . . . waited . . . Seconds seemed like hours . . .

The golden head of Rianmon abruptly filled their vision. She was grinning silently, stepping upon the cliff. They gazed up to the top of her head and cheered with heavy relief. "Kim! TK! You are all right!" Yamato said.

Kim was holding on the lavender fur with a secure grasp as Takeru had his arms around her waist, also tightly. Their eyes were shut tight. At Yamato's voice, Kim opened one of her brown eyes, and seeing herself safe, exhaled with weary relief. She seemed to be so relieved that her body suddenly loosed up, laying limply on her Digimon's back. Takeru popped both his eyes and quickly gazed around. Seeing himself safe, he made a beaming grin and embraced Kim so warmly that she gazed at him with surprise. The kids slid off into the cheering group.

"Thank you, Rianmon." Kim kissed her Digimon on the snout, and she blushed, red against golden.

Yamato checked on Takeru for any injuries. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah!" Takeru beamed, but then he remembered something. His face grew sad. "But I lost Kim's camera."

At that, Kim smiled down to him. "That's all right, TK. What is important is that you are safe." Rianmon seemed to make a smirk and

raised her tail. All could see the camera hanging from one of the spikes by its black strap, dusty but undamaged. Kim grinned and received the camera. "Thank you, Rianmon, and you, too, TK."

Rianmon glowed for an instant, and she shrunk into Iyumon. She was congratulated by her new Digimon friends.

Yamato stood and walked up to Kim. "Thank you for saving my brother's life." His voice was contented.

Kim met his grey-blue eyes for a moment and looked down, smiling modestly.

Takeru stepped forward, looking up to her. His face was pure guilt. "I am sorry, Kim."

Kim turned to him. "For what, TK?"

"I didn't trust you before."

She knelt to meet Takeru in the eyes. "I do understand that."

"But it is not always right, right, Kim?"

Kim scratched her chin in deep thought, her brown eyes holding mischief. "I think I must feast on you first."

"What?!" Takeru gasped, stepping back, his eyes wide in alarm to Kim.

"Just kidding!"

The kids and the Digimon laughed, Kim and Takeru being the loudest.

Who Cares?

By Debbie (Dai-chan) *^_^*

The path was rugged and steep, climbing up a small mountain, weaving through high walls of rocks. The path was difficult to climb, often left behind by Digimon who believed it was just hazardous. But a small group of humans and Digimon was climbing upon the path, acting on confidence to search for one of their lost companions. Three boys walked in a single line. The oldest one was at the lead, tossing away a lock of blond from his sweating forehead, but his grey-blue eyes were hard with the desire to continue. The littlest boy in the middle of the line followed his brother, his blond hair also drenched with sweat under his green-blue hat. The last boy at the end panted, not used to walk a lot, his thick red hair clouding his eyes, sticking to his forehead.

"Ah, I can't believe it," complained Koushiro. "If we are going to seek for Kim that way, our feet will be black and blue with bruises." He may be harsh about the walking, but he was gentle to his Digimon partner. Motimon heavily dozed in Koushiro's arms, resting from the recent battle with Vademon. Koushiro was very gentle not to wake him.

"I think we will be black and blue all over by the time we find her,"

said Takeru. He took off his hat and fanned himself with it. He even fanned his Digimon pal, Patamon, who hovered by him. Patamon smiled with relief at the cool breeze.

Takeru's brother, Yamato and his Digimon companion, Tsunomon said nothing, just moving on.

The path became less rugged and more level. They found that the path abruptly ended at the edge of a jungle tangled with thick vines. That looked like there was no way to enter the thick vines.

Takeru dropped down to the ground, leaning on his arms. "I don't wanna go anywhere." Patamon landed on his lap, also tired from flying. Koushiuro collapsed by the boy, panting still. Motimon opened one black eye and yawned.

Yamato looked back to the young boys and grimaced. They shouldn't stop looking. They should keep searching for Kim. He wanted to find her. The very idea of unable to find her was enough to make Yamato feel anxious. He hoped she was safe . . . Looking again to the boys, he sighed and muttered, "Ok, guys. We will take a break." He could hear Takeru and Koushiuro exhale their breaths with relief. Turning his back to them, he began to wonder if he would ever find her. .

.

As if he can read his mind, Tsunomon said, "I wonder where we can find Kim."

Silently, Yamato landed his blue eyes on the jungle and strolled to the edge of the jungle, scanning around with serious concern. Tsunomon stood by him, also searching.

"Maybe I could discover something in my computer," suggested Koushiuro as he opened his green backpack that contained his yellow-and-white laptop. Motimon jumped out of the way and watched with sleepy eyes while his human partner typed on.

By the red-haired boy's side, Takeru watched his brother with a thoughtful, sad gaze. He missed Kim. He missed her simple, gentle smile that reminded him so much of his mother. He missed the way she speaks, so patient and kind; she never lost her temper with anybody. He also missed the protective Iyumon, the strong compassion hiding behind her hard, cautious red eyes. The adventures would be not the same without them. He wondered if Yamato ever misses Kim.

"Izzy," Takeru turned to him, "do you think we will find Kim?"

"Precisely," answered Koushiuro, his black eyes glued on the glowing screen, his fingers tapping in a blurred motion.

"How?"

"We will find a way." But Koushiuro didn't sound so positive.

Takeru watched him typing, curious at what was Koushiuro searching for. Koushiuro's face was carved into a focused expression. He muttered quietly to himself, so quietly that Takeru didn't understand what was he saying, but he assumed he was a bit aggravated about something.

Koushiro grunted with frustration. "All the information and still nothing about where could Kim be." He rested his chin on one of his yellow-gloved hands as the other tapped at the keyboard.

Takeru sighed. He leaned back on his hands, his eyes on the sky. He wondered if they would ever find her. Suddenly, a beep came from the right side of his backpack. His Digivice was beeping! All turned to Takeru in surprise as he looked at the Digivice. A red spot blinked in the tiny screen, blinking along with the repeating beep.

"Your Digivice found Kim!" Patamon remarked from Takeru's lap.

Takeru stood up so fast that Patamon had to flutter his wings to get out of his way. Takeru ran toward Yamato, Tsunomon, and the jungle. The Digivice beeped louder and more frequent as he moved closer to the edge. "Kim must be in the jungle!" he said, pointing to the jungle.

Yamato murmured an odd, almost pleased hum in his throat.

"What's it, Matt?" asked Koushiro as he arrived, Motimon in his arms.

Yamato shook his head. "Nothing." Inside, he struggled to hold down the sudden joy to see Kim at last.

Motimon caught something in his vision. He pointed toward it, saying, "Hey, I see a path in the jungle."

All followed Takeru down the path, the beeping Digivice leading the way. The path was clear of the tangling vines, though some hung low enough to force Yamato to duck under. As the Digivice beeped louder, Takeru became excited to find Kim, and he ran faster with ease through the path. Koushiro and Yamato shouted at him to wait, to slow down, but he didn't listen. Followed by Patamon, Takeru kept running and almost burst himself out of the vine-tangled jungle into a river beach. Ahead was a wide, quiet river, the sounds of the water whistling among rocks music to Takeru's ears. Upstream, he could see a beautiful-sculptured, white-marbled bridge across the river into another area of the jungle, with no vines. The river passed through the jungle.

"Wow, it is so beautiful!" Patamon murmured in awe as the other kids stepped out from the path.

Yamato looked upstream and downstream. "Yeah, but where is Kim?" He almost sounded disappointed.

Something near the bridge attracted Takeru's eyes. A mass of purple laid near the bridge, moving a little, almost like it was sighing sadly. He squinted and gasped. "Oh, look over there!" he pointed.

All followed his pointing finger and saw the mass. All gasped almost in shocked unison.

"Iyumon!"

Deeply sorrowed, Iyumon laid on her stomach, her horned head resting on her forepaws. Her curled tail rested among her paws. Her usual cautious red eyes were clouded with sadness, staring out in the river. And at her side, laid a brass tag and a Digivice, as if were tossed away with no care.

Iyumon looked up when she heard her name being called by familiar voices. She saw the three boys and Digimon, and a bit of joy stirred in her heart.

"Iyumon, are you all right?" Koushiro asked with concern as they arrived to her.

"I'm so glad to see you guys!" Iyumon said with happiness.

"Where is Kim?" Yamato asked with gentleness, remembering the pain in the purple lizard-like Digimon's eyes. His heart clenched painfully at the thought of Kim being in danger.

Iyumon's red eyes gazed up to Yamato's grey-blue eyes and looked away. "Who cares? She is gone forever."

The boys and Digimon gasped.

"What do you mean, she is gone forever?" Tsunomon said from at Yamato's feet.

Takeru gently spook, "Please tell us what happened."

Iyumon turned to the littlest boy and suddenly was warmed by the innocent eyes. She sighed softly. "Well, we had searched nearly everywhere. We never lose hope that we might find Tai and you guys. But one night, I eavesdropped Kim talking with a voice."

_A flashback . . . _

—

A fire roared in the center of the clearing in a forest. Kim rested against a willow tree as her Digimon friend, Iyumon slept at her feet, her snout usually hiding in her paws. Kim was almost tranced by the fire, watching the red-orange flames dancing on the sticks. Often she saw, one by one, the hazed faces of her friends, long gone, and she was missing them greatly. She still hoped that she will find them.

"Couldn't sleep?"

Kim startled at the voice. The voice seemed to come from everywhere, and she looked around with uneasiness as she stood up. "Who is there?" her voice quavered.

"Don't be afraid. I am a friend," the voice soothed. Kim suddenly had a strange feeling that she shouldn't trust the voice, but the voice was only kind and peaceful. It continued, "Could you not find your friends? Don't you know the reason why they left you?"

"What?" Kim asked. When the voice didn't answer, Kim walked to the edge of the circle of the firelight. Her brown eyes searched the darkness behind the light. "Do you know?"

The voice seemed to completely change, sounded dark and bitter.
"Don't anybody? They don't care about you."

"Care?" Kim paled, stunned.

The voice hissed, "If they care, would they leave you?" Then silence.

Kim blinked at the silence and yelled out, "Hello? Hey, where did you go?" She stopped at a thought. Her voice was low, shaking, "Maybe it left because it doesn't care." Her dark-skinned face slowly frowned, a rare frown she barely had on her face. The frown was displeased. Kim wasn't naive, but the bold words of the voice had a strong effect on her.

She heard the yawning of a waking Iyumon. She didn't move when Iyumon asked with concern, "Kim, what's the matter?"

Kim looked down, her back facing the Digimon. _Maybe she doesn't care about me, Kim thought, and her frown deepened. Her voice was monotone as she answered, "Nothing."_

—

_ 'We wandered longer, but one day Kim snapped.' _

—

Kim and Iyumon were crawling through a thorn bed. They were blocked by the thorn bed, and the only way to get to the other side was by crawling through. Kim forced to crawl on her belly, pushing forward by her arms. The thorns tugged on her shirt and black braids, and often she had to duck to avoid the scratching thorns. Iyumon crawled behind, pushing forward by her black talons, digging in the soft ground.

A thorn scratched on Kim's left cheek, drawing a thin streak of red. Kim groaned and grimaced. Iyumon saw what happened and said with worried concern, "Be careful, Kim." Kim answered none, crawling on.

Finally, they arrived at the river with the marble bridge. Iyumon shook dirt off her fur and moved on to the bridge. When she noticed she was alone, she looked back at Kim, who stood frozen, her yellow-gloved hand touching the bleeding scratch on her cheek. "Come on, Kim. We just can't stop now," Iyumon said.

Kim gazed down to her hand, the blood drying on the glove. Slowly, the hand shook, clenching into a fist. Her face was pure fury. Her voice boomed with new ferocity. "Ohh! It's hopeless! We have been searching for the others for nearly two months, and they are gone! There is no way we will find them!"

Iyumon gasped softly, but shook her head in confidence. "Kim, we will find them -"

"No, Iyumon!" Kim cut her off. "We will never find them! It's hopeless. I don't understand. Why should I search for them?"

Iyumon stared at her in shock.

Her brown eyes unusually hard with hatred, Kim stared at the slowly flowing river. "I don't care about them anymore. If we can't stay together, why should I search for them?"

"They are your friends!" Iyumon said, beginning to worry about what had happened to her gentle Kim.

"No, they aren't if they leave us. I don't care what would happen to them. I don't care! And you!" Kim turned to her Digimon with fury. She stomped nearer as her voice strained with scorn. "If you still want to find them, be my guest. You don't need me. I don't need you." She said the last right in Iyumon's face. Iyumon cowered, her red eyes misting over. With two yanks, Kim pulled off the string around her neck that held the small brass tag, and jerked the Digivice from her green belt. "Take the crest and Digivice if you care. I have no care about them." She threw them at Iyumon's feet.

Kim turned on her feet and ran across the bridge, disappearing in the opposite side of the jungle. Iyumon stood in stunned silence, two tears running down her face. Her eyes never left the spot where her Kim vanished in, the tears landing on the silver crest of the dull-shined tag. . .

Yamato knelt and gently picked the tag and Digivice. He could see two dry spots on the tag where the tears landed on. He shook his head in disbelief at Iyumon's tale. It was not like Kim. He knew she will never hate anybody. It must be the voice. "I will bet that the voice Kim was talking to is Demidevimon." He scowled at the thought of the sly batty Digimon.

"It was like when I got angry with Tokomon," said Takeru, looking at Patamon. He remembered when Demidevimon had a dark plan to make Takeru and Tokomon mad at each other for no reason in particular. Takeru would hate to see his friends hate each other. Turning to his brother, Takeru pleaded, "We must find her, Matt!"

Koushiro stood by Yamato's other side, looking down to the crest. "I am concerned that the crest would be worthless to Kim if she resists caring. But TK is right. We must find her."

Yamato nodded in agreement. "All right. Lead the way, Iyumon."

The boys followed Iyumon across the bridge and entered the jungle. What they didn't know was that two yellow eyes, sly and dark, watched every move.

Meanwhile . . .

—

Kim brushed back a low branch as she ducked under a tree. Her braids had few leaves entwined together. She had several scratches on her arms from the clawing branches. Her red tank top and dark blue jeans were streaked with dirt, and so was her face. But she didn't care. She didn't care about anything. Her mind was empty; she didn't even think about any of her friend, or Iyumon. Her face was scowling so

long that the frown would be permanent on her face.

"Hello, dear."

Kim didn't stop weaving through the jungle when she heard the hissing voice. She had heard that voice before - at the campfire when it showed her the realization that her so-called friends never care about her. She mumbled bitterly, "Ah, it's you again. Leave me alone."

She could hear a rustling above her, but she moved on. The voice came out, almost sad. "Is that the way you treat your friend?"

At the word friend, Kim stopped, resting against a trunk. She pushed away a branch and tried to see what the creature above that the voice belonged to was. "Friend?"

The voice was closer, like it was whispering in her ear. "It appears that I am your only friend. You ex-friends left you, but I didn't leave you."

Kim snorted and ducked under the branch, moving on. "I have no friends. I don't care about you."

Two slanted red eyes watched with pleasure as the girl vanished in the low branches. The voice hissed, "It is good she hates. She is very valuable to me. As long as she hates everybody, she will be useless to the Digidestined." He laughed maliciously, and the creature slithered down the ground. He glanced at where the girl disappeared and smirked devilishly. The creature slunk the opposite way, moved so fast that he was like a green flash. He arrived at a space in the middle of the jungle. A decaying building made of dry mud, tan and black, stood in the center. The sunlight shone through countless cracks, illuminating wilting and drying plants inside.

The rays didn't even light up the snake-like creature, which seemed to have the darkness cloaked around him, making a dusky aura. The creature himself was dark except his red eyes. Scales of slimy green and night blue covered his serpentine body as black stripes lined his back. A long mane of dark red ran down his back. Two arms jerked with the thought to grab something, never rested.

Serpenmon is my name. Hatred is my game. I go around the world to spread hatred.

—

"Serpenmon!"

The snake-like Digimon hooded his eyes at the annoying voice. A small flying Digimon soared in the building, black feathered with two yellow eyes. Serpenmon arched one of his scaly eyebrows and hissed, his tongue rippling out his mouth, "What's it, pint?"

Demidevimon flushed red, furious at being called a pint, but kept his mouth shut. Serpenmon wasn't known for his temper, but was known for the way he expressed his anger. He would not try to test that. He cleared his throat. "How does it go with the girl?"

Serpenmon crossed his arms and grinned, revealing two rows of

yellow-rotted fangs. "She is doing well. She will be perfect to spread hatred for me. She has a lot of hatred." The last sentence he spoke was rich with savor.

Demidevimon wrinkled his nose in disgust at the hideous Digimon and fluttered his wings to add boldness to his voice. "Don't you forget our deal."

Serpenmon lowered his eyelids over his eyes farther. His tail coiled around him, and he laid back casually. "I don't forget. I get the girl, and you get the crest and tag. Fair deal."

His yellow eyes blazing with delight, Demidevimon nodded. "Very good." He turned away to leave, but held back on a thought. "Oh, one thing. Three of the girl's friends are coming here to find her."

The tongue flickered hungrily. "Excellent! More kids to spread the hatred!"

"Don't let them get to the girl."

Serpenmon's red eyes opened wide so sudden that Demidevimon was almost blinded by the red blaze. Serpenmon's voice was menacing. "You forget what I do for a living, pint."

Seeing that no discussion was continued and an excuse to escape that bizarre Digimon, Demidevimon turned away and flew out the building. He could hear the snaky Digimon snickering evilly.

Kim stepped around a thick tree and found herself in a clearing. A glass dome stood radiantly in the center, its multicolored windows reflecting off every color of light, seeming to glow with its own light. Kim stood for a moment, cherishing the sight. "Wow, it is beautiful. It would be an illusion, but who cares?"

She ran toward it. Her backpack with her precious camera inside slid off her shoulder to the ground, forgotten. The dome had no doors, but an entrance to open from inside. She entered and saw beautiful blossoms lined the path, the sweet, spiced stench filling the air. And in the center of the garden, stood a swing, the rudder seat gently dangling by an invisible breeze.

Kim walked up to the swing and touched the seat. It was warm, like someone had recently swung. She spoke slowly, "I remember . . . I like to swing and dream as long as I want, having no care about the world."

A hissing voice whispered from above, answering her, "Yes, Kim. Go ahead and swing. You don't care about anything. You don't care about your family. You don't care about your friends. You don't even care about yourself. Swing."

As if was hypnotized by the voice, Kim sat down on the seat and gripped on the cool chains that connected the seat to the swing. She began to swing, not the excited swing that often brought your feet up in the air, but the calm, thoughtful swing that your feet still touched the ground. Her brown eyes closed, her face almost seeming to soften with the memory.

And Serpenmon chuckled darkly from above.

Iyumon stepped out of the jungle and found herself in a clearing. She could hear the boys complain about the thickness and shook her head, smiling. Humans can be so weird, she thought. She waited until the boys and Digimon got out the jungle. Tsunomon, Motimon, and Patamon were small enough to pass through with ease. Even though Iyumon was bigger than them, she knew her way well around jungles. The boys had leaves and dirt all over, and they dusted themselves off. The group saw a colorful glass dome in the center, shining brightly.

They stood in awe until Koushiro narrowed his onyx eyes toward the dome. He blinked and said, "Hey, it is an illusion."

"How could you tell?" Yamato asked, looking down to him.

Iyumon squinted and nodded. "He is right. Look harder."

The rest squinted and for an instant, the dome seemed to shimmer as if was in the heated air. Realizing the truth behind the illusion, they now saw a tan-black dried mud, decaying building that seemed ready to fall apart.

"What a strange building," said Tsunomon.

Patamon suddenly saw a hint of red near the building. "Hey, I see something!" He soared forward, his friends following. He landed and picked up something. As they came closer, Patamon was holding a small red backpack in his black paws.

"That's Kim backpack!" Motimon remarked as Koushiro picked it up delicately. His brown eyes grew concerned. "She never goes anywhere without her camera."

Iyumon eyed the bag and gazed up the slack building. "She might be inside that."

All entered the building and saw the colorful flowers everywhere. But they now saw the truth, and the blossoms were actually drying and wilting plants, all ugly brown. The stench of bitter rotted floats in the air. And in the center, a girl swung calmly, her eyes closed.

"Kim!"

The dark-skinned girl opened her brown eyes at her name and gazed up. She saw three boys that were vaguely familiar to her. Slowly she remembered as the boys ran toward her. The solitary red-haired boy that always had her to listen to for advice. Koushiro . . . The littlest blond boy with those innocent eyes that always touched her heart so. Takeru . . . The older boy that always made her wonder about his secretive smile whenever he flashed it at her. Yamato . . . There were her friends, special friends that helped her discover about herself, along with her own help to discover themselves. Her friends. . .

Yamato arrived to her, a beaming smile on his face. He reached to touch her on the arm. The moment she felt the sudden warmth upon her arm, she jerked her arm away, her brown eyes bitter. "Stay away from

me!"

Yamato's grey-blue eyes went wide at her fierce voice.
"Kim?"

Something snapped inside her. Kim nearly bellowed out her words. "How dare you face me after what had you done! You left me for no reason without a trace! Why should you care about me? Go and find the others. Leave me alone. I don't need you."

The young boys and their Digimon stood in bewilderment at her. Iyumon gazed up to her with misted red eyes. Yamato still didn't believe it. This was not like Kim. Grabbing her shoulders, Yamato forced Kim to gaze in his eyes. "No, Kim. We stay together, no matter what or why. Together, we are strong. Like it or not, we need each other. We need you." Then his voice dropped. "I need you."

Yamato could see a hint of sadness and warmth behind her hard brown eyes. She still cared, but barely. Seeing him staring at her, Kim looked away, "Strong words, Matt, but it doesn't make me feel better."

"Say, what is going on here?"

The boys startled at the dark hissing voice. Yamato let go of Kim and gazed up in fright. A snaky Digimon slithered from the darkness that hid from the sunlight peeking through cracks above. Two red eyes glowed with an inner light, blinking from the hooded scaly eyebrows. Serpenmon let the boys took in his horrible looks, and suddenly, with a flash of his tail, smacked the small Digimon, sending them flying over and crashing into a wall. They laid in a stunned daze.

Before the boys could react, Serpenmon wrapped them with his tail, coiling around them, binding them. The boys groaned and struggled.

And Kim simply watched with silence, still seated on the swing.

Serpenmon spoke like a scolding father. "Don't feed that 'caring, happiness' nonsense to my sweet Kim." From the corner of his eye, the Digimon slowly woke, groaning with pain. "Don't try, wimps, or your partners will be flat in an instant." As a warning, Serpenmon tightened his tail a bit, and the boys gasped with the pressure.

"Kim," Yamato gasped out, "do something!"

Her brown eyes instantly seemed to hood, just like Serpenmon's eyes. She closed her eyes and began to swing. Her voice was soft, but mocking. "Why me? Why should I care?"

Serpenmon laughed vilely. "That's my girl. Now, let's go, you wimps, and I will find a nice place for you to stay." His nature was mocking. He gently lifted the dazed Digimon in his scaled hands and loosed his tail so the boys could breathe easier. He slithered away, entered a darkened hall. Yamato looked back with grief at Kim, who swung on, not caring.

The boys couldn't see the hall, too dark to let the single ray of

sunlight to shine through from a crack. They could hear a key clanging and the creaks of rusted hinges. Serpenmon calmly putted the Digimon in a cage, and uncoiled his tail so the boys could be free. He putted them in the cage along with the Digimon. He locked the cage and hung the key above the cage. In the single sliver of light, the boys could see Serpenmon gazing down at them for a moment, his eyes red slits in the darkness. Then he left.

Koushiro watched the Digimon and gazed back to his friends. "It seems hopeless to save Kim. She is lost to us."

Yamato violently shook his head. "No! I refuse to believe it!" But Kim's fierce words burned in his mind. Leave me alone. I don't need you. She wasn't the old Kim. She wasn't Kim at all. Sadly, Yamato crossed his arms over his knees, and buried his head in them.

Takeru sat by the cage, and gazed up to the single ray. The light warmed his face, but it didn't warm his heart. He didn't understand why Kim hates them. She would never hate them for any reason. She always cared. He closed his eyes and rested his cheek on the cold, rusted metal. A lone tear ran down his cheek.

A lone tear turned down her cheek. Kim didn't bother to wipe it away. She didn't remember why she was crying. Something vague still warmed her heart that caused the tear to be born. But what was this something? It must be a part of her. Maybe it was . . . She forgot. Kim sighed and swung on, her eyes closed.

'Kim?'

—

Kim opened her eyes and looked around. A familiar voice. . .

'Don't lose your empathy. You do care. You always care. That's what makes you unique. Listen to your heart.'

—

Kim blinked. She remembered the voice. "Sora?" She stopped swinging and stood up. She gazed around the colorful blossoms, and she was alone. No one was here with her, but the voice was so close. "Sora!" Kim shouted. No one answered back to her. Her eyes misted over, and tears ran down her face, leaving wet streaks behind. She knelt and bowed her head. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to stop caring."

The voice came from behind her. _'You will never stop caring if you listen to your heart.'_

—

Kim felt a comforted hand resting on her shoulder, giving her a soothing squeeze. Startled, Kim looked back over her shoulder, but no hand was there. Standing, Kim scanned around. She was seeing the truth, and she found herself in a slack building with wilting plants around her feet. She saw the truth about herself - she does care. Her face, that used to frown with hatred, began to brighten with care. "Thank you, Sora."

Kim turned and ran down the hall where Serpenmon vanished with her

friends as Sora and Biyomon watched on.

The boys and Digimon were sleeping, exhausted from the search. Iyumon curled herself near Yamato, burying her snout in her paws. Her keen hearing perked up at the sound of a key clanging, and she opened her eyes. She saw, in the single ray of light, the patient face of Kim turning the lock. Her brown eyes were their usual softness, and she smiled gently, putting a finger over her mouth. "Shh."

The rest woke at the creaking hinges. Kim stood in the doorway, gazing on each of her friends, tears in her eyes. Her voice was low, ashamed. "Guys, I am sorry about the way I acted back there. I do care. I always do care."

Yamato beamed warmly at her. "I always know you will come back to us."

Takeru ran to embrace her. "We got our Kim back!" At his words, Kim returned the hug, holding him to herself, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Yamato reached in his jeans pocket and drew out Kim's crest and Digivice. "Here," he said, holding out them. Koushiro also held up her red backpack they had found outside. Kim received them thankfully. She looked outside carefully and beckoned them to follow her. They followed her down the hall until they entered the dying garden.

"Leaving so soon?" came a hissing voice.

They looked back in alarm as Serpenmon slithered out of the darkness.

"Run!" Kim cautioned. The group dashed for the entrance, wanting to escape the snaky Digimon. Suddenly, Kim noticed her Digimon was not with her. Stopping in her tracks, Kim gazed back and saw Iyumon standing courageously before Serpenmon, tiny compared to his monstrous bulk.

"Iyumon!" she shouted.

Iyumon bared her fangs, white against purple fur. Her voice was fierce, growling. "How dare you make Kim hate!" She lowered her horns and shouted, "Rainbow Disc!" Discs of all colors soared from her horns toward Serpenmon. But they had no effect on him. The glowing discs simply faded in the darkness surrounding him.

Serpenmon grinned darkly and, with a wave of his tail, smacked her in the face, sending her flying through the air. She crashed into a wall, this time the chunks of mud falling on her, covering her.

"Digimon, attack!" Tsunomon and Motimon leaped up in the air and spitted out small pink bubbles out from their mouths. Patamon inhaled his breath and shrieked out a bubble of solid air. Still, the attacks had no damage on Serpenmon. Now slightly annoyed, Serpenmon again attacked the Digimon with his tail, they crashing into Iyumon.

"It's useless!" Yamato said from Kim's side.

Kim's fists shook with hatred, the hatred she had from the snake that made her hate her friends and herself. "No! Iyumon, digivolve!"

_Her Digivice shrieked . . . _

_

Iyumon, digivolve into Rianmon!

_

Wasting no time, Rianmon roared, "Bomb Blaze!" and a sphere of white-orange light soared out from her mouth. Serpenmon dodged the blazing light, and it crashed behind. Serpenmon looked really irritated, his red eyes blazing brighter than the Bomb Blaze.

"You fools!" he said viciously, "Don't you realize that I will never be defeated as long as hatred is in your hearts!" He raised his arms as if was conjuring something. "Hatred Haze!"

A black mist formed around Rianmon's feet, swirling around, rising. Soon Rianmon was surrounded by the black mist. She gave out a short, pained howl before she got choked by the mist. Serpenmon flickered his hands once, and Rianmon, along with the mist, hovered up so fast that she crashed into the ceiling. The ceiling collapsed, and the kids ran away, avoiding the chunks. Serpenmon flickered again, and Rianmon was tossed into a wall, the mist vanishing.

"Rianmon!" Kim ran up to her friend. At that moment, Serpenmon snatched the unsuspected boys in his scaly hands, Koushiro and Takeru punching at the scales in one hand as Yamato struggling in another. Kim skidded in her tracks and looked back in panic.

"Now, to get rid of you measly boys," Serpenmon hissed, red eyes burning in the boys' terrified eyes.

"No, wait!" All gazed down to Kim, who ran forward, slowing down. Kim's brown eyes were filled with distress. "I - I give up." She knelt.

"Kim, no!" Yamato gasped.

"See how easy it is?" Serpenmon spoke softly, but not mocking. "You are valuable to me because you have a lot of hatred in your heart. You know why? Because the one who cares the most also hates the most."

Kim didn't move, her brown eyes glued on the red eyes.

"Don't believe him!" Rianmon groaned, struggling to stand up.

"Silence, you lizard, or your friends will be flatten." His tail twitched over the groggy Digimon.

Kim's voice grew bolder. "You don't need the boys. Let them go. I am the one you want."

Serpenmon hooded his eyes. "You say you don't care about them?"

Kim frowned and looked down. She could hear her friends groaning at the added pressure Serpenmon gives. She must do something! But how? The only way she could think of to defeat Serpenmon was to lie to him, hoping he will let them go in exchange for herself. She gazed back with new strength. "No, I don't care about them!" She could see the shocked faces of her friends from the hands, but it wasn't the time to hesitate. "But let them go. They are worthless to you, Serpenmon."

The Digimon seemed to smile, the corners of his lips pulling back. "Well, if they are worthless, and you don't care what would happen to them, I as well as dispose them." He tightened his hands, and the agonized screams of the boys filled the air.

"NOOOO!" Kim screamed along with them.

_Her crest glowed silver . . . Her Digivice shrieked The image of the Crest of Empathy - a rainbow with a closing spiral at an end - glowed with tiny stars . . . _

-

Glittering stars appeared out of nowhere and surrounded Rianmon until she was a figure of white.

-

_Rianmon, digivolve into . . . _

-

Rianmon stood in the clouds of black and silver, circling in place. A piece of darkness swooped down and covered her. Beneath the darkness, Rianmon stood on her hind legs, and you noticed that she was now in the form of a woman, but hidden, her back facing you. The darkness formed into a cloak, a hood covering her head. Two golden horns ripped through the hood, slanting forward. A pair of golden heeled boots covered her feet. Her hands reached out, pale in color, and a pair of golden gloves slid on her waiting hands. Stars came in and formed huge dark purple bat-like wings on her back to their tips, then returned to her cloak. Rianmon glanced sidelong to you, and a gold star sparkled on her neck, acting as a brooch that held her cloak in place. Rianmon leaped up in the air, showing her form-fitting uniform of dark purple, flew around to stand in place. She was floating in midair, her arms low as her cloak lazily swayed. Her face was pale purple, womanlike. Her eyes were golden with white pupils. There was a red stripe running down the middle of her forehead and three red runes on each cheek under her eyes. She had a belt of golden stars. Her wings were outspread as she silently gazed at you with mystery.

-

. . . Nightrianmon!

-

Nightrianmon is the ultimate form of Rianmon. She is one of the rare Digimon that attack with mind power. Beware of her extraordinary psychic powers!

—

Nightrianmon spoke not by her voice, but by her mind._ 'You heard the girl. Let them go.' She pointed toward him. A silver glow surrounded her, and then the glow surrounded Serpenmon. He opened his mouth to shriek, but no sound came out. He was completely paralyzed, but his hands acted on their own, releasing the boys. Also surrounded by the silver glow, the boys gently hovered to the ground, safe._

—

"Kim, are you all right?" Yamato asked in concern as he ran to her. Kim didn't answer, her face awed at her Digimon.

Serpenmon was heaved by the silver glow, just like when he used the black mist to lift Rianmon. He was tossed away, crashing backward into a wall. The glow vanished, and Nightrianmon floated in midair, her golden eyes dark.

Serpenmon rose himself, and his glowing red eyes met the dark golden eyes. "Grr, you will never defeat me, Nightrianmon! Hatred Haze!" The black mist drifted toward Nightrianmon, preparing to bind her. But she again glowed with the silver aura, and the moment the mist touched the aura, it was immediately destroyed, gone in a blink.

"What?!" Serpenmon gasped, enraged.

_ 'Hatred has no power over us,' Nightrianmon said with a sly smirk on her lips. _ 'Star Twist!' Her cloak began to flutter as if by a breeze. White stars soared from her cloak, spinning into weapons of light. Their sharp points stabbed and pierced Serpenmon as he screamed, waving his arms and tail to attack them. The stars were like a swarm of gnats, impossible to get rid of, and Serpenmon escaped into the darkness.__

—

Stars returned on her cloak. Nightrianmon raised her head, and suddenly the building shook as if by an earthquake. Her words came to the kids in their minds. _ 'Leave this place. I will bring the building to ruins to stop Serpenmon from spreading his hatred.' _

—

"No!" Kim stood, shaking her head. "I won't leave you!"

Nightrianmon gazed down at her with the dark eyes. Go!

Yamato grabbed Kim's hand and dragged her. The rest were already heading for the entrance. Yamato and Kim ran as fast as they could, dodging the falling chunks of mud. The very moment their feet stepped on the outside ground, the building collapsed. Yamato yanked Kim down to the ground. He shielded himself over her to protect her from the showering small chunks and dust. Then the earthquake halted.

"No!" Kim yelled, looking back at the heap of dried mud and dust. Her Digimon was nowhere in sight. No sound was heard except her and

Yamato's quickened breaths. Her breaths came in short sobs, crying for her friend. Yamato held her, trying to comfort her. Then she heard a groan and looked up in hesitant hope. She saw a tiny pink-orange Digimon, streaked with dirt, crawling out, looking fatigued.

"Sunomon!" Kim ran to her small Digimon and held her close. She buried her face in Sunomon's warm fur. "I am sorry."

Sunomon embraced her back. "You never stop caring. I can feel it." She looked up in Kim's eyes, her own red eyes merry. "If we keep caring, nothing will defeat us." Kim smiled in tears and suddenly was surrounded by the cheering Koushiro, Takeru, Motimon, Patamon, and Tsunomon, hugging her and Sunomon, laughing with merriment. Kim was completely buried by the laughing boys and Digimon, she laughing also.

Yamato stood alone, watching the group. He smiled, warmth in his eyes. _We got Kim back, and her empathy is stronger than before. Sunomon is right. If we keep caring, we can do anything possible. Then he gave a surprised squeal as a giggling Kim tackled him to the ground, tickling him. For a moment, he felt like a child, and, laughing, he tickled her back playfully. The rest also jumped on them, tackling and tickling until the group became a tangle of laughter. Laughter was contagious, and the sounds of warm laughter rang in the air. _

—

Never the End . . .

2. Who Cares?

Who Cares?

Between 'Princess Karaoke' and 'Sora's Crest of Love'

By Debbie (Dai-chan) *^_^*

The path was rugged and steep, climbing up a small mountain, weaving through high walls of rocks. The path was difficult to climb, often left behind by Digimon who believed it was just hazardous. But a small group of humans and Digimon was climbing upon the path, acting on confidence to search for one of their lost companions. Three boys walked in a single line. The oldest one was at the lead, tossing away a lock of blond from his sweating forehead, but his grey-blue eyes were hard with the desire to continue. The littlest boy in the middle of the line followed his brother, his blond hair also drenched with sweat under his green-blue hat. The last boy at the end panted, not used to walk a lot, his thick red hair clouding his eyes, sticking to his forehead.

"Ah, I can't believe it," complained Izzy. "If we are going to seek for Kim that way, our feet will be black and blue with bruises." He may be harsh about the walking, but he was gentle to his Digimon partner. Motimon heavily dozed in Izzy's arms, resting from the recent battle with Vademon. Izzy was very gentle not to wake him.

"I think we will be black and blue all over by the time we find her," said TK. He took off his hat and fanned himself with it. He even fanned his Digimon pal, Patamon, who hovered by him. Patamon smiled with relief at the cool breeze.

TK's brother, Matt or his Digimon companion, Tsunomon said nothing, just moving on.

The path became less rugged and more level. They found that the path abruptly ended at the edge of a jungle tangled with thick vines. That looked like there was no way to enter the thick vines.

TK dropped down to the ground, leaning on his arms. "I don't wanna go anywhere." Patamon landed on his lap, also tired from flying. Izzy collapsed by the boy, panting still. Motimon opened one black eye and yawned.

Matt looked back to the young boys and grimaced. They shouldn't stop looking. They should keep searching for Kim. He wanted to find her. The very idea of unable to find her was enough to make Matt feel anxious. He hoped she was safe . . . Looking again to the boys, he sighed and muttered, "Ok, guys. We will take a break." He could hear TK and Izzy exhale their breaths with relief. Turning his back to them, he began to wonder if he would ever find her. . .

As if he can read his mind, Tsunomon said, "I wonder where can we find Kim."

Silently, Matt landed his blue eyes on the jungle and strolled to the edge of the jungle, scanning around with serious concern. Tsunomon stood by him, also searching.

"Maybe I could discover something in my computer," suggested Izzy as he opened his green backpack that contained his yellow-and-white laptop. Motimon jumped out of the way and watched with sleepy eyes while his human partner typed on.

By the red-haired boy's side, TK watched his brother with a thoughtful, sad gaze. He missed Kim. He missed her simple, gentle smile that reminded him so much of his mother. He missed the way she speaks, so patient and kind; she never lose her temper with anybody. He also missed the protective Iyumon, the strong compassion hiding behind her hard, cautious red eyes. The adventures would be not the same without them. He wondered if Matt ever misses Kim.

"Izzy," TK turned to him, "do you think we will find Kim?"

"Precisely," answered Izzy, his black eyes glued on the glowing screen, his fingers tapping in a blurred motion.

"How?"

"We will find a way." But Izzy didn't sound so positive.

TK watched him typing, curious at what was Izzy searching for. Izzy's face was carved into a focused expression. He muttered quietly to himself, so quietly that TK didn't understand what was he saying, but he assumed he was a bit aggravated about something.

Izzy grunted with frustration. "All the information and still nothing about where could Kim be." He rested his chin on one of his yellow-gloved hands as the other tapped at the keyboard.

TK sighed. He leaned back on his hands, his eyes on the sky. He wondered if they would ever find her. Suddenly, a beep came from the right side of his backpack. His Digivice was beeping! All turned to TK in surprise as he looked at the Digivice. A red spot blinked in the tiny screen, blinking along with the repeating beep.

"Your Digivice found Kim!" Patamon remarked from TK's lap.

TK stood up so fast that Patamon had to flutter his wings to get out of his way. TK ran toward Matt, Tsunomon, and the jungle. The Digivice beeped louder and more frequent as he moved closer to the edge. "Kim must be in the jungle!" he said, pointing to the jungle.

Matt murmured an odd, almost pleased hum in his throat.

"What's it, Matt?" asked Izzy as he arrived, Motimon in his arms.

Matt shook his head. "Nothing." Inside, he struggled to hold down the sudden joy to see Kim at last.

Motimon caught something in his vision. He pointed toward it, saying, "Hey, I see a path in the jungle."

All followed TK down the path, the beeping Digivice leading the way. The path was clear of the tangling vines, though some hung low enough to force Matt to duck under. As the Digivice beeped louder, TK became excited to find Kim, and he ran faster with ease through the path. Izzy and Matt shouted at him to wait, to slow down, but he didn't listen. Followed by Patamon, TK kept running and almost burst himself out of the vine-tangled jungle into a river beach. Ahead was a wide, quiet river, the sounds of the water whistling among rocks music to TK's ears. Upstream, he could see a beautiful-sculptured, white-marbled bridge across the river into another area of the jungle, with no vines. The river passed through the jungle.

"Wow, it is so beautiful!" Patamon murmured in awe as the other kids stepped out from the path.

Matt looked upstream and downstream. "Yeah, but where is Kim?" He almost sounded disappointed.

Something near the bridge attracted TK's eyes. A mass of purple laid near the bridge, moving a little, almost like it was sighing sadly. He squinted and gasped. "Oh, look over there!" he pointed.

All followed his pointing finger and saw the mass. All gasped almost in shocked unison.

"Iyumon!"

Deeply sorrowed, Iyumon laid on her stomach, her horned head resting on her forepaws. Her curled tail rested among her paws. Her usual cautious red eyes were clouded with sadness, staring out in the

river. And at her side, laid a brass tag and a Digivice, as if were tossed away with no care.

Iyumon looked up when she heard her name being called by familiar voices. She saw the three boys and Digimon, and a bit of joy stirred in her heart.

"Iyumon, are you all right?" Izzy asked with concern as they arrived to her.

"I'm so glad to see you guys!" Iyumon said with happiness.

"Where is Kim?" Matt asked with gentleness, remembering the pain in the purple lizard-like digimon's eyes. His heart clenched painfully at the thought of Kim being in danger.

Iyumon's red eyes gazed up to Matt's grey-blue eyes and looked away. "Who cares? She is gone forever."

The boys and Digimon gasped.

"What do you mean, she is gone forever?" Tsunomon said from at Matt's feet.

TK gently spook, "Please tell us what happened."

Iyumon turned to the littlest boy and suddenly was warmed by the innocent eyes. She sighed softly. "Well, we had searched nearly everywhere. We never lose hope that we might find Tai and you guys. But one night, I eavesdropped Kim talking with a voice."

_A flashback . . . _

—

A fire roared in the center of the clearing in a forest. Kim rested against a willow tree as her Digimon friend, Iyumon slept at her feet, her snout usually hiding in her paws. Kim was almost tranced by the fire, watching the red-orange flames dancing on the sticks. Often she saw, one by one, the hazed faces of her friends, long gone, and she was missing them greatly. She still hoped that she will find them.

"Couldn't sleep?"

Kim startled at the voice. The voice seemed to come from everywhere, and she looked around with uneasiness as she stood up. "Who is there?" her voice quavered.

"Don't be afraid. I am a friend," the voice soothed. Kim suddenly had a strange feeling that she shouldn't trust the voice, but the voice was only kind and peaceful. It continued, "Could you not find your friends? Don't you know the reason why they left you?"

"What?" Kim asked. When the voice didn't answered, Kim walked to the edge of the circle of the firelight. Her brown eyes searched the darkness behind the light. "Do you know?"

The voice seemed to completely change, sounded dark and bitter. "Don't anybody? They don't care about you."

"Care?" Kim paled, stunned.

The voice hissed, "If they care, would they leave you?" Then silence.

Kim blinked at the silence and yelled out, "Hello? Hey, where did you go?" She stopped at a thought. Her voice was low, shaking, "Maybe it left because it doesn't care." Her dark-skinned face slowly frowned, a rare frown she barely had on her face. The frown was displeased. Kim wasn't naive, but the bold words of the voice had a strong effect on her.

She heard the yawning of a waking Iyumon. She didn't move when Iyumon asked with concern, "Kim, what's the matter?"

Kim looked down, her back facing the Digimon. _Maybe she doesn't care about me, Kim thought, and her frown deepened. Her voice was monotone as she answered, "Nothing."_

—

_ 'We wandered longer, but one day Kim snapped.' _

—

Kim and Iyumon were crawling through a thorn bed. They were blocked by the thorn bed, and the only way to get to the other side was by crawling through. Kim forced to crawl on her belly, pushing forward by her arms. The thorns tugged on her shirt and black braids, and often she had to duck to avoid the scratching thorns. Iyumon crawled behind, pushing forward by her black talons, digging in the soft ground.

A thorn scratched on Kim's left cheek, drawing a thin streak of red. Kim groaned and grimaced. Iyumon saw what happened and said with worried concern, "Be careful, Kim." Kim answered none, crawling on.

Finally, they arrived at the river with the marble bridge. Iyumon shook dirt off her fur and moved on to the bridge. When she noticed she was alone, she looked back at Kim, who stood frozen, her yellow-gloved hand touching the bleeding scratch on her cheek. "Come on, Kim. We just can't stop now," Iyumon said.

Kim gazed down to her hand, the blood drying on the glove. Slowly, the hand shook, clenching into a fist. Her face was pure fury. Her voice boomed with new ferocity. "Ohh! It's hopeless! We have been searching for the others for nearly two months, and they are gone! There is no way we will find them!"

Iyumon gasped softly, but shook her head in confidence. "Kim, we will find them -"

"No, Iyumon!" Kim cut her off. "We will never find them! It's hopeless. I don't understand. Why should I search for them?"

Iyumon stared at her in shock.

Her brown eyes unusually hard with hatred, Kim stared at the slowly

flowing river. "I don't care about them anymore. If we can't stay together, why should I search for them?"

"They are your friends!" Iyumon said, beginning to worry about what had happened to her gentle Kim.

"No, they aren't if they leave us. I don't care what would happen to them. I don't care! And you!" Kim turned to her Digimon with fury. She stomped nearer as her voice strained with scorn. "If you still want to find them, be my guest. You don't need me. I don't need you." She said the last right in Iyumon's face. Iyumon cowered, her red eyes misting over. With two yanks, Kim pulled off the string around her neck that held the small brass tag, and jerked the Digivice from her green belt. "Take the crest and Digivice if you care. I have no care about them." She threw them at Iyumon's feet.

Kim turned on her feet and ran across the bridge, disappearing in the opposite side of the jungle. Iyumon stood in stunned silence, two tears running down her face. Her eyes never left the spot where her Kim vanished in, the tears landing on the silver crest of the dull-shined tag. . .

Matt knelt and gently picked the tag and Digivice. He could see two dry spots on the tag where the tears landed on. He shook his head in disbelief at Iyumon's tale. It was not like Kim. He knew she will never hate anybody. It must be the voice. "I will bet that the voice Kim was talking to is Demidevimon." He scowled at the thought of the sly batty Digimon.

"It was like when I got angry with Tokomon," said TK, looking at Patamon. He remembered when Demidevimon had a dark plan to make TK and Tokomon mad at each other for no reason in particular. TK would hate to see his friends hate each other. Turning to his brother, TK pleaded, "We must find her, Matt!"

Izzy stood by Matt's other side, looking down to the crest. "I am concerned that the crest would be worthless to Kim if she resists to care. But TK is right. We must find her."

Matt nodded in agreement. "All right. Lead the way, Iyumon."

The boys followed Iyumon across the bridge and entered the jungle. What they didn't know was that two yellow eyes, sly and dark, watched every move.

Meanwhile . . .

—

Kim brushed back a low branch as she ducked under a tree. Her braids had few leaves entwined together. She had several scratches on her arms from the clawing branches. Her red tank top and dark blue jeans were streaked with dirt, and so was her face. But she didn't care. She didn't care about anything. Her mind was empty; she didn't even think about any of her friend, or Iyumon. Her face was scowling so long that the frown would be permanent on her face.

"Hello, dear."

Kim didn't stop weaving through the jungle when she heard the hissing voice. She had heard that voice before - at the campfire when it showed her the realization that her so-called friends never care about her. She mumbled bitterly, "Ah, it's you again. Leave me alone."

She could hear a rustling above her, but she moved on. The voice came out, almost sad. "Is that the way you treat your friend?"

At the word friend, Kim stopped, resting against a trunk. She pushed away a branch and tried to see what was the creature above that the voice belonged to. "Friend?"

The voice was closer, like it was whispering in her ear. "It appears that I am your only friend. You ex-friends left you, but I didn't leave you."

Kim snorted and ducked under the branch, moving on. "I have no friends. I don't care about you."

Two slanted red eyes watched with pleasure as the girl vanished in the low branches. The voice hissed, "It is good she is hating. She is very valuable to me. As long as she hates everybody, she will be useless to the Digidestined." He laughed maliciously, and the creature slithered down the ground. He glanced at where the girl disappeared and smirked devilishly. The creature slunk the opposite way, moved so fast that he was like a green flash. He arrived at a space in the middle of the jungle. A decaying building made of dry mud, tan and black, stood in the center. The sunlight shone through countless cracks, illuminating wilting and drying plants inside.

The rays didn't even light up the snake-like creature, who seemed to have the darkness cloaked around him, making a dusky aura. The creature himself was dark except his red eyes. Scales of slimy green and night blue covered his serpentine body as black stripes lined his back. A long mane of dark red ran down his back. Two arms jerked with the thought to grab something, never rested.

Serpenmon is my name. Hatred is my game. I go around the world to spread hatred.

—

"Serpenmon!"

The snake-like Digimon hooded his eyes at the annoying voice. A small flying Digimon soared in the building, black feathered with two yellow eyes. Serpenmon arched one of his scaly eyebrows and hissed, his tongue rippling out his mouth, "What's it, pint?"

Demidevimon flushed red, furious at being called a pint, but kept his mouth shut. Serpenmon wasn't known for his temper, but was known for the way he expressed his anger. He would not try to test that. He cleared his throat. "How does it go with the girl?"

Serpenmon crossed his arms and grinned, revealing two rows of yellow-rotted fangs. "She is doing well. She will be perfect to spread hatred for me. She has a lot of hatred." The last sentence he spoke was rich with savor.

Demidevimon wrinkled his nose in disgust at the hideous Digimon and fluttered his wings to add boldness to his voice. "Don't you forget our deal."

Serpenmon lowered his eyelids over his eyes farther. His tail coiled around him, and he laid back casually. "I don't forget. I get the girl, and you get the crest and tag. Fair deal."

His yellow eyes blazing with delight, Demidevimon nodded. "Very good." He turned away to leave, but held back on a thought. "Oh, one thing. Three of the girl's friends are coming here to find her."

The tongue flickered hungrily. "Excellent! More kids to spread the hatred!"

"Don't let them get to the girl."

Serpenmon's red eyes opened wide so sudden that Demidevimon was almost blinded by the red blaze. Serpenmon's voice was menacing. "You forget what I do for a living, pint."

Seeing that no discussion was continued and an excuse to escape that bizarre Digimon, Demidevimon turned away and flew out the building. He could hear the snaky Digimon snickering evilly.

Kim stepped around a thick tree and found herself in a clearing. A glass dome stood radiantly in the center, its multicolored windows reflecting off every color of light, seeming to glow with its own light. Kim stood for a moment, cherishing the sight. "Wow, it is beautiful. It would be an illusion, but who cares?"

She ran toward it. Her backpack with her precious camera inside slid off her shoulder to the ground, forgotten. The dome had no doors, but an entrance to open from inside. She entered and saw beautiful blossoms lined the path, the sweet, spiced stench filling the air. And in the center of the garden, stood a swing, the rudder seat gently dangling by an invisible breeze.

Kim walked up to the swing and touched the seat. It was warm, like someone had recently swung. She spoke slowly, "I remember . . . I like to swing and dream as long as I want, having no care about the world."

A hissing voice whispered from above, answering her, "Yes, Kim. Go ahead and swing. You don't care about anything. You don't care about your family. You don't care about your friends. You don't even care about yourself. Swing."

As if was hypnotized by the voice, Kim sat down on the seat and gripped on the cool chains that connected the seat to the swing. She began to swing, not the excited swing that often brought your feet up in the air, but the calm, thoughtful swing that your feet still touched the ground. Her brown eyes closed, her face almost seeming to soften with the memory.

And Serpenmon chuckled darkly from above.

Iyumon stepped out of the jungle and found herself in a clearing. She could hear the boys complain about the thickness and shook her head, smiling. Humans can be so weird, she thought. She waited until the boys and Digimon got out the jungle. Tsunomon, Motimon, and Patamon were small enough to pass through with ease. Even though Iyumon was bigger than them, she knew her way well around jungles. The boys had leaves and dirt all over, and they dusted themselves off. The group saw a colorful glass dome in the center, shining brightly.

They stood in awe until Izzy squinted his onyx eyes toward the dome. He blinked and said, "Hey, it is an illusion."

"How could you tell?" Matt asked, looking down to him.

Iyumon squinted her red eyes and nodded. "He is right. Look harder."

The rest squinted their eyes and for an instant, the dome seemed to shimmer as if was in the heated air. Realizing the truth behind the illusion, they now saw a tan-black dried mud, decaying building that seemed ready to fall apart.

"What a strange building," said Tsunomon.

Patamon suddenly saw a hint of red near the building. "Hey, I see something!" He soared forward, his friends following. He landed and picked up something. As they came closer, Patamon was holding a small red backpack in his black paws.

"That's Kim backpack!" Motimon remarked as Izzy picked it up delicately. His brown eyes grew concerned. "She never goes anywhere without her camera."

Iyumon eyed the bag and gazed up the slack building. "She might be inside that."

All entered the building and saw the colorful flowers everywhere. But they now saw the truth, and the blossoms were actually drying and wilting plants, all ugly brown. The stench of bitter rotted floats in the air. And in the center, a girl swung calmly, her eyes closed.

"Kim!"

The dark-skinned girl opened her brown eyes at her name and gazed up. She saw three boys that were vaguely familiar to her. Slowly she remembered as the boys ran toward her. The solitary red-haired boy that always had her to listen to for advice. Izzy . . . The littlest blond boy with that innocent eyes that always touched her heart so. TK . . . The older boy that always made her wonder about his secretive smile whenever he flashed it at her. Matt . . . There were her friends, special friends that helped her discover about herself, along with her own help to discover themselves. Her friends. . .

Matt arrived to her, a beaming smile on his face. He reached to touch her on the arm. The moment she felt the sudden warmth upon her arm, she jerked her arm away, her brown eyes bitter. "Stay away from me!"

Matt's grey-blue eyes went wide at her fierce voice.
"Kim?"

Something snapped inside her. Kim nearly bellowed out her words. "How dare you face me after what had you done! You left me for no reason without a trace! Why should you care about me? Go and find the others. Leave me alone. I don't need you."

The young boys and their Digimon stood in bewilderment at her. Iyumon gazed up to her with misted red eyes. Matt still didn't believe it. This was not like Kim. Grabbing her shoulders, Matt forced Kim to gaze in his eyes. "No, Kim. We stay together, no matter what or why. Together, we are strong. Like it or not, we need each other. We need you." Then his voice dropped. "I need you."

Matt could see a hint of sadness and warmth behind her hard brown eyes. She still cared, but barely. Seeing him staring at her, Kim looked away, "Strong words, Matt, but it doesn't make me feel better."

"Say, what is going on here?"

The boys startled at the dark hissing voice. Matt let go of Kim and gazed up in fright. A snaky Digimon slithered from the darkness that hid from the sunlight peeking through cracks above. Two red eyes glowed with an inner light, blinking from the hooded scaly eyebrows. Serpenmon let the boys took in his horrible looks, and suddenly, with a flash of his tail, smacked the small Digimon, sending them flying over and crashing into a wall. They laid in a stunned daze.

Before the boys could react, Serpenmon wrapped them with his tail, coiling around them, binding them. The boys groaned and struggled.

And Kim simply watched with silence, still seated on the swing.

Serpenmon spoke like a scolding father. "Don't feed that 'caring, happiness' nonsense to my sweet Kim." From the corner of his eye, the Digimon slowly woke, groaning with pain. "Don't try, wimps, or your partners will be flat in an instant." As a warning, Serpenmon tightened his tail a bit, and the boys gasped with the pressure.

"Kim," Matt gasped out, "do something!"

Her brown eyes instantly seemed to hood, just like Serpenmon's eyes. She closed her eyes and began to swing. Her voice was soft, but mocking. "Why me? Why should I care?"

Serpenmon laughed vilely. "That's my girl. Now, let's go, you wimps, and I will find a nice place for you to stay." His nature was mocking. He gently lifted the dazed Digimon in his scaled hands and loosed his tail so the boys could breathe easier. He slithered away, entered a darkened hall. Matt looked back with grief at Kim, who swung on, not caring.

The boys couldn't see the hall, too dark to let the single ray of sunlight to shine through from a crack. They could hear a key clanging and the creaks of rusted hinges. Serpenmon calmly putted the

Digimon in a cage, and uncoiled his tail so the boys could be free. He putted them in the cage along with the Digimon. He locked the cage and hung the key above the cage. In the single sliver of light, the boys could see Serpenmon gazing down at them for a moment, his eyes red slits in the darkness. Then he left.

Izzy watched the Digimon and gazed back to his friends. "It seems hopeless to save Kim. She is lost to us."

Matt violently shook his head. "No! I refuse to believe it!" But Kim's fierce words burned in his mind. Leave me alone. I don't need you. She wasn't the old Kim. She wasn't Kim at all. Sadly, Matt crossed his arms over his knees, and buried his head in them.

TK sat by the cage, and gazed up to the single ray. The light warmed his face, but it didn't warm his heart. He didn't understand why Kim hates them. She would never hate them for any reason. She always cared. He closed his eyes and rested his cheek on the cold, rusted metal. A lone tear ran down his cheek.

A lone tear turned down her cheek. Kim didn't bother to wipe it away. She didn't remember why was she crying. Something vague still warmed her heart that caused the tear to be born. But what was this something? It must be a part of her. Maybe it was . . . She forgot. Kim sighed and swung on, her eyes closed.

'Kim?'

—

Kim opened her eyes and looked around. A familiar voice. . .

'Don't lose your empathy. You do care. You always care. That's what makes you unique. Listen to your heart.'

—

Kim blinked. She remembered the voice. "Sora?" She stopped swinging and stood up. She gazed around the colorful blossoms, and she was alone. No one was here with her, but the voice was so close. "Sora!" Kim shouted. No one answered back to her. Her eyes misted over, and tears ran down her face, leaving wet streaks behind. She knelt and bowed her head. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to stop caring."

The voice came from behind her. _'You will never stop caring if you listen to your heart.'_

—

Kim felt a comforted hand resting on her shoulder, giving her a soothing squeeze. Startled, Kim looked back over her shoulder, but no hand was there. Standing, Kim scanned around. She was seeing the truth, and she found herself in an slack building with wilting plants around her feet. She saw the truth about herself - she does care. Her face, that used to frown with hatred, began to brighten with care. "Thank you, Sora."

Kim turned and ran down the hall where Serpenmon vanished with her friends as Sora and Biyomon watched on.

The boys and Digimon were sleeping, exhausted from the search. Iyumon curled herself near Matt, burying her snout in her paws. Her keen hearing perked up at the sound of a key clanging, and she opened her eyes. She saw, in the single ray of light, the patient face of Kim turning the lock. Her brown eyes were their usual softness, and she smiled gently, putting a finger over her mouth. "Shh."

The rest woke at the creaking hinges. Kim stood in the doorway, gazing on each of her friends, tears in her eyes. Her voice was low, ashamed. "Guys, I am sorry about the way I acted back there. I do care. I always do care."

Matt beamed warmly at her. "I always know you will come back to us."

TK ran to embrace her. "We got our Kim back!" At his words, Kim returned the hug, holding him to herself, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Matt reached in his jeans pocket and drew out Kim's crest and Digivice. "Here," he said, holding out them. Izzy also held up her red backpack they had found outside. Kim received them thankfully. She looked outside carefully and beckoned them to follow her. They followed her down the hall until they entered the dying garden.

"Leaving so soon?" came a hissing voice.

They looked back in alarm as Serpenmon slithered out of the darkness.

"Run!" Kim cautioned. The group dashed for the entrance, wanting to escape the snaky Digimon. Suddenly, Kim noticed her Digimon was not with her. Stopping in her tracks, Kim gazed back and saw Iyumon standing courageously before Serpenmon, tiny compared to his monstrous bulk.

"Iyumon!" she shouted.

Iyumon bared her fangs, white against purple fur. Her voice was fierce, growling. "How dare you make Kim hate!" She lowered her horns and shouted, "Rainbow Disc!" Discs of all colors soared from her horns toward Serpenmon. But they had no effect on him. The glowing discs simply faded in the darkness surrounding him.

Serpenmon grinned darkly and, with a wave of his tail, smacked her in the face, sending her flying through the air. She crashed into a wall, this time the chunks of mud falling on her, covering her.

"Digimon, attack!" Tsunomon and Motimon leaped up in the air and spitted out small pink bubbles out from their mouths. Patamon inhaled his breath and shrieked out a bubble of solid air. Still, the attacks had no damage on Serpenmon. Now slightly annoyed, Serpenmon again attacked the Digimon with his tail, they crashing into Iyumon.

"It's useless!" Matt said from Kim's side.

Kim's fists shook with hatred, the hatred she had from the snake that made her hate her friends and herself. "No! Iyumon, digivolve!"

_Her Digivice shrieked . . . _

_

Iyumon, digivolve into Rianmon!

_

Wasting no time, Rianmon roared, "Bomb Blaze!" and a sphere of white-orange light soared out from her mouth. Serpenmon dodged the blazing light, and it crashed behind. Serpenmon looked really irritated, his red eyes blazing brighter than the Bomb Blaze.

"You fools!" he said viciously, "Don't you realize that I will never be defeated as long as hatred is in your hearts!" He raised his arms as if was conjuring something. "Hatred Haze!"

A black mist formed around Rianmon's feet, swirling around, rising. Soon Rianmon was surrounded by the black mist. She gave out a short, pained howl before she got choked by the mist. Serpenmon flickered his hands once, and Rianmon, along with the mist, hovered up so fast that she crashed into the ceiling. The ceiling collapsed, and the kids ran away, avoiding the chunks. Serpenmon flickered again, and Rianmon was tossed into a wall, the mist vanishing.

"Rianmon!" Kim ran up to her friend. At that moment, Serpenmon snatched the unsuspected boys in his scaly hands, Izzy and TK punching at the scales in one hand as Matt struggling in another. Kim skidded in her tracks and looked back in panic.

"Now, to get rid of you measly boys," Serpenmon hissed, red eyes burning in the boys' terrified eyes.

"No, wait!" All gazed down to Kim, who ran forward, slowing down. Kim's brown eyes were filled with distress. "I - I give up." She knelt.

"Kim, no!" Matt gasped.

"See how easy it is?" Serpenmon spoke softly, but not mocking. "You are valuable to me because you have a lot of hatred in your heart. You know why? Because the one who cares the most also hates the most."

Kim didn't move, her brown eyes glued on the red eyes.

"Don't believe him!" Rianmon groaned, struggling to stand up.

"Silence, you lizard, or your friends will be flatten." His tail twitched over the groggy Digimon.

Kim's voice grew bolder. "You don't need the boys. Let them go. I am the one you want."

Serpenmon hooded his eyes. "You say you don't care about them?"

Kim frowned and looked down. She could hear her friends groaning at the added pressure Serpenmon gives. She must do something! But how?

The only way she could think of to defeat Serpenmon was to lie to him, hoping he will let them go in exchange for herself. She gazed back with new strength. "No, I don't care about them!" She could see the shocked faces of her friends from the hands, but it wasn't the time to hesitate. "But let them go. They are worthless to you, Serpenmon."

The Digimon seemed to smile, the corners of his lips pulling back. "Well, if they are worthless, and you don't care what would happen to them, I as well as dispose them." He tightened his hands, and the agonized screams of the boys filled the air.

"NOOOO!" Kim screamed along with them.

_Her crest glowed silver . . . Her Digivice shrieked The image of the Crest of Empathy - a rainbow with a closing spiral at an end - glowed with tiny stars . . . _

-

Glittering stars appeared out of nowhere and surrounded Rianmon until she was a figure of white.

-

_Rianmon, digivolve into . . . _

-

Rianmon stood in the clouds of black and silver, circling in place. A piece of darkness swooped down and covered her. Beneath the darkness, Rianmon stood on her hind legs, and you noticed that she was now in the form of a woman, but hidden, her back facing you. The darkness formed into a cloak, a hood covering her head. Two golden horns ripped through the hood, slanting forward. A pair of golden heeled boots covered her feet. Her hands reached out, pale in color, and a pair of golden gloves slid on her waiting hands. Stars came in and formed huge dark purple bat-like wings on her back to their tips, then returned to her cloak. Rianmon glanced sidelong to you, and a gold star sparkled on her neck, acting as a brooch that held her cloak in place. Rianmon leaped up in the air, showing her form-fitting uniform of dark purple, flew around to stand in place. She was floating in midair, her arms low as her cloak lazily swayed. Her face was pale purple, womanlike. Her eyes were golden with white pupils. There was a red stripe running down the middle of her forehead and three red runes on each cheek under her eyes. She had a belt of golden stars. Her wings were outspread as she silently gazed at you with mystery.

-

. . . Nightrianmon!

-

Nightrianmon is the ultimate form of Rianmon. She is one of the rare Digimon that attack with mind power. Beware of her extraordinary psychic powers!

-

Nightrianmon spoke not by her voice, but by her mind._ 'You heard the girl. Let them go.' She pointed toward him. A silver glow surrounded her, and then the glow surrounded Serpenmon. He opened his mouth to shriek, but no sound came out. He was completely paralyzed, but his hands acted on their own, releasing the boys. Also surrounded by the silver glow, the boys gently hovered to the ground, safe._

—

"Kim, are you all right?" Matt asked in concern as he ran to her. Kim didn't answer, her face awed at her Digimon.

Serpenmon was heaved by the silver glow, just like when he used the black mist to lift Rianmon. He was tossed away, crashing backward into a wall. The glow vanished, and Nightrianmon floated in midair, her golden eyes dark.

Serpenmon rose himself, and his glowing red eyes met the dark golden eyes. "Grr, you will never defeat me, Nightrianmon! Hatred Haze!" The black mist drifted toward Nightrianmon, preparing to bound her. But she again glowed with the silver aura, and the moment the mist touched the aura, it was immediately destroyed, gone in a blink.

"What?!" Serpenmon gasped, enraged.

_ 'Hatred has no power over us,' Nightrianmon said with a sly smirk on her lips. _ 'Star Twist!' Her cloak began to flutter as if by a breeze. White stars soared from her cloak, spinning into weapons of light. Their sharp points stabbed and pierced Serpenmon as he screamed, waving his arms and tail to attack them. The stars were like a swarm of gnats, impossible to get rid of, and Serpenmon escaped into the darkness.__

—

Stars returned on her cloak. Nightrianmon raised her head, and suddenly the building shook as if by an earthquake. Her words came to the kids in their minds. _ 'Leave this place. I will bring the building to ruins to stop Serpenmon from spreading his hatred.' _

—

"No!" Kim stood, shaking her head. "I won't leave you!"

Nightrianmon gazed down at her with the dark eyes. Go!

Matt grabbed Kim's hand and dragged her. The rest were already heading for the entrance. Matt and Kim ran as fast as they could, dodging the falling chunks of mud. The very moment their feet stepped on the outside ground, the building collapsed. Matt yanked Kim down to the ground. He shielded himself over her to protect her from the showering small chunks and dust. Then the earthquake halted.

"No!" Kim yelled, looking back at the heap of dried mud and dust. Her Digimon was nowhere in sight. No sound was heard except her and Matt's quickened breaths. Her breaths came in short sobs, crying for her friend. Matt held her, trying to comfort her. Then she heard a

groan and looked up in hesitant hope. She saw a tiny pink-orange Digimon, streaked with dirt, crawling out, looking fatigued.

"Sunomon!" Kim ran to her small Digimon and held her close. She buried her face in Sunomon's warm fur. "I am sorry."

Sunomon embraced her back. "You never stop caring. I can feel it." She looked up in Kim's eyes, her own red eyes merry. "If we keep caring, nothing will defeat us." Kim smiled in tears and suddenly was surrounded by the cheering Izzy, TK, Motimon, Patamon, and Tsunomon, hugging her and Sunomon, laughing with merriment. Kim was completely buried by the laughing boys and Digimon, she laughing also.

Matt stood alone, watching the group. He smiled, warmth in his eyes. We got Kim back, and her empathy is stronger than before. Sunomon is right. If we keep caring, we can do anything possible. Then he gave a surprised squeal as a giggling Kim tackled him to the ground, tickling him. For a moment, he felt like a child, and, laughing, he tickled her back playfully. The rest also jumped on them, tackling and tickling until the group became a tangle of laughter. Laughter was contagious, and the sounds of warm laughter rang in the air.

Never the End . . .

End
file.